

endeavors and God bless you all. May God continue to bless our great country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The discussion began at 10:45 a.m. at the Department of Commerce. In his remarks, the President referred to Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans.

Remarks to the National Catholic Educational Association

January 9, 2004

Welcome, please. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. *[Laughter]* Welcome to the people's house. We're glad you're here.

The last 100 years, the leadership of the National Catholic Education Association has been vital in advancing the work of Catholic schools around the Nation and, therefore, has been vital to the hopeful future of America. I'm honored to join you for celebrating your 100th anniversary. And this is a fitting place to celebrate the anniversary.

Catholic schools carry out a great mission, to serve God by building knowledge and character of our young people. It's a noble calling. It's an important part of the fabric of America. By teaching the Word of God, you prepare your students to follow a path of virtue and compassion and sacrifice for the rest of their lives. And by insisting on high standards for academic achievement, Catholic schools are a model for all schools around our country.

I was hoping to run into a fellow Texan today. *[Laughter]* His Excellency Gregory Aymond is the bishop from Austin, Texas. *[Laughter]* He is—I'm glad there's only a handful of Texans here. *[Laughter]* The bishop is the board chair of the National Catholic Education Association, and I want to thank you for joining us.

I appreciate Michael Guerra. Michael Guerra is the president of the National Catholic Education Association. Michael, thank you, and thank you for all the board members who graciously had a picture taken in the Blue Room with me. I appreciate you doing that.

His Excellency John Cummins, who is the bishop emeritus of Oakland, California, is

with us. His Excellency, thank you for being here, sir.

I appreciate Carl Anderson, the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, and Dorian for joining us today.

I'm sorry my neighbor His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick is not with us, a decent man. *[Laughter]* I really, really am proud to call him friend. He's a really good guy, as we say in Texas.

I appreciate you all coming. I really do. Thanks for being here.

Catholic educators share the basic conviction that every child can learn, and every child can learn to lead a life of service. That's a pretty good mission statement, isn't it? Let us teach every child to read and write and add and subtract, and as we do so, let us teach every child to serve a cause greater than self. The whole Nation benefits because of the good scholars and good citizens who graduate from Catholic schools. That is a fact.

Through your faith in every child—and I emphasize “every child”—Catholic schools have overcome challenges and experienced remarkable results. It is well known that Catholic schools operate on small budgets. *[Laughter]* The per-pupil cost in a Catholic school classroom is substantially below the per-pupil costs of many other schools, public or private.

And yet, the results are astonishing: 2.6 million students who attend Catholic schools will graduate—that's 99 percent—and almost all go to college. Even though the per-pupil expenditure per classroom is low, the results are extremely high. And it says something is going right—*[laughter]*—starting with the fact that Catholic schools have high expectations. You challenge what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. You believe in the worth of every person and every child. You believe that inherent in every child is the capacity to learn. And you refuse to quit on any child.

The Catholic schools understand that love and discipline go hand in hand. The Catholic schools are willing to change curriculum if it doesn't work. The Catholic schools sometimes meet longer hours than some would expect is the norm. Take LaSalle Academy, a Catholic school in Philadelphia. Students

attend classes from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the school year is several weeks longer than average. Whatever it takes to make sure no child is left behind, the Catholic schools do.

In addition to learning to read and write, students take courses in computers and music and art. At David McDonough, the principal of the school said this, "We bombard them"—that would be his students—[laughter]—"We bombard them with love, attention, and work, and they thrive."

An important part of the Catholic education is the commitment to serving what our society calls the disadvantaged student, regardless of religious affiliation. I appreciate that a lot. These are the students who sometimes in the public school system are deemed to be uneducable and, therefore, are just moved through the system. The Catholic schools have done our country a great service by a special outreach to minority children, who make up 26 percent of the enrollment of our Catholic schools. This is a great service to those children and their parents and our country.

Catholic schools have a proven record of bringing out the best in every child, regardless of their background. And every school in America should live up to that standard. We want our public schools to live up to the standard you have set in Catholic schools.

I signed what's called the No Child Left Behind Act. It is the most historic education reform in a generation. It actually passed with bipartisan support, which is unusual for Washington these days. [Laughter] Let me tell you a little bit about the philosophy behind the law, and I think you'll find it to be reminiscent.

First, the law assumes that every child can learn and, therefore, expects every child to learn. We've increased Federal spending and now, for the—at the Federal level, primarily for Title I students, many of whom would be—go to your schools, if they went to the—would be eligible for this program if they went to public schools, many of your students would be eligible for this program. But in return we now expect results. See, we believe every child can learn, and therefore, we're saying to States, "You must measure to show us whether a child has learned to read and

write and add and subtract. And if not, let's solve the problem early, before it's too late."

In other words, we've introduced accountability into the system for the first time, insisted upon accountability, and then said, "Let's have enough money available to correct problems." And so now the States must test regularly, every year. And if the curriculum isn't working, you change it. And if it is working, there will be plenty of praise. If the math programs aren't working, change them, because we now expect results. Because like the Catholic schools, we believe in the worth of every child. We're challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations by raising the standard and refusing to accept the status quo when our children are not learning.

We've also done something different as well. We've insisted that these schools post results. It's an interesting phenomena to see a parent react when the expectation isn't met for a public school. In other words, everything may be fine, and all of a sudden the test scores are revealed and, oops, my school is not doing like I thought it was doing and, therefore, I, a parent, should become more involved in my child's school when I see failure.

But even beyond that, we've begun introducing to the system for the first time at the Federal level the capacity to take Federal money and spend that money in the private sector to get special tutorials. In other words, if a child is trapped in a school which is failing and won't change, after a reasonable period of time, there is some money that follows the child and the child can take that money, the parent can take that money and get his or her child additional tutoring—at a public facility, private charity, or at a Catholic school.

And so all of a sudden the No Child Left Behind Act not only demands accountability, but we've also started to empower parents to make additional choices for their child when the child is trapped into a school that won't change. And that includes, by the way, not only private tutoring but also a additional public school, a different—in other words, what we're trying to do is introduce parental involvement through accountability standards.

Parents, I believe—and I believe we ought to expand this opportunity further, which we're trying to do here in Washington, DC. And I want to describe to you right quick what this administration has done, where you can help a little bit in perhaps influencing the process, to begin what I think is a major reform.

As you know, the Government is responsible for much of the education in Washington, DC. And so working with people in Congress, we decided to expand on the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act and introduce school choice here in Washington. Under this program the Federal Government would provide what's called scholarships to low-income families with children in under-performing schools—these families whose children clearly need better choices; if you're going to an under-performing school, you need a better choice—would receive a scholarship of up to \$7,500, Federal money, to help meet the cost of tuition at any school of the parents' choice, a private school or a Catholic school, for that matter.

I suspect that this program would have a lot of takers when we can get it funded, because I think some parents, any parent, regardless of his or her income status, wants the best for their child. And when they begin to feel like the school isn't meeting the child's needs, it's just natural that they be looking for an alternative. The Catholic school system here in DC provides a really good alternative. And the Federal Government is now willing to help fund that alternative.

The good news is education is a priority in DC. The Mayor, a good fellow and a strong leader, recognizes the advantages of having a school choice program. Mayor Tony Williams is a strong supporter of the initiative we put forth on Capitol Hill. The House passed a bill that provides \$14 million for this \$7,500 per child scholarship program. It is a part of the Senate omnibus bill—that's what we call it, an omnibus bill—that has yet to be passed. The omnibus bill contains a lot of other parts of the appropriations process. The Senate is getting ready to come back into town. For the sake of educational excellence and for the sake of trusting parents to make the right decision for their children, for the sake, really, of helping to begin

a change in education around the country, for the sake of helping the Catholic schools in the DC area fulfill their mission, meet their obligation, and to continue doing the excellent work they're doing, the Senate needs to pass this bill and make school choice in Washington, DC, a reality.

I want to build on this vital reform. I'm going to ask Congress to provide 50 million new dollars in this year's budget for what we call a national choice incentive fund. The program would award Federal grants to communities and organizations that help students, especially those from low-income families and those trapped in under-performing schools, to find a better education, become seed money for additional programs like the DC choice program I just described to you.

The initiative has a simple goal, yet it's a profound goal, to help more parents send their children to the school that is best for them, no matter what kind of school it is. When parents have more control over their children's education, children have a better chance to learn, schools have a better incentive to improve.

Much of what is behind the No Child Left Behind Act, the spirit and the philosophy of the No Child Left Behind Act, came from the examples set by the Catholic schools. It's a sense of what is possible. It is a sense that everybody has worth, that each soul matters. And therefore, we will not accept systems that just shuffle people through.

Everyone involved in the National Catholic Education Association can look back with pride over 100 years of excellence. And that's what we're here to celebrate today, 100 years of excellence. You are serving God by serving our children. You are making America a stronger and more compassionate country, one child at a time. Congratulations and thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Bishop Gregory J. Aymond of Austin, TX; Dorian Anderson, wife of Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus; and Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, DC. He also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title

I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10).

Memorandum on the Safety, Health, and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) Initiative

January 9, 2004

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: The Safety, Health, and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) Initiative

The cost of Federal workplace injuries, when measured by workers' compensation losses, is more than \$2 billion and 2 million lost production days annually. In fiscal year 2003, the Federal workforce of almost 2.7 million filed more than 168,000 injury claims. Behind these numbers lie pain and suffering by workers and their families. Clearly, Government agencies should strive to do more to improve workplace safety and health and reduce the costs of injury to workers and taxpayers. Many workplace injuries are preventable.

Therefore, I am establishing SHARE: Safety, Health, and Return-to-Employment Initiative, a safe workplace initiative for fiscal years 2004-2006. The initiative's four goals cover the most important elements of a strong safety and health management program: lower workplace injury and illness case rates, lower lost-time injury and illness case rates, timely reporting of injuries and illnesses, and fewer lost days resulting from work injuries and illnesses. The Secretary of Labor will lead the SHARE Initiative and will measure the performance of each department and agency against the goals. I direct all executive branch departments and agencies to participate in SHARE for this 3-year period.

Each department and agency will collaborate with the Department of Labor to establish challenging annual goals based on its current performance in the four areas. The Department of Labor will measure and track agency performance, and will report to me annually on each agency's progress towards meeting its goals. The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Office of Workers' Compensation

Programs will also work with Federal departments and agencies to develop new workplace strategies to improve safety and health at high injury rate sites, assist them in improving the timeliness of reporting claims through electronic and other means, and guide them in providing suitable work and tools for injured and disabled employees.

Federal supervisors and managers must focus management tools and resources on eliminating unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. Federal employees should be encouraged to perform their jobs safely, effectively, and alertly to remain injury-free. Dedication to ensuring our Government workforce family is safe and healthy preserves the resources of Government and helps promote the delivery of Government services to the American people.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 3

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC.

January 5

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan to congratulate the Afghan Government on the adoption of a constitution and to discuss the war on terror and the Kandahar-Kabul highway. Later, he had a telephone conversation with President-elect Oscar Berger of Guatemala to congratulate him on his electoral victory and to discuss Guatemala-U.S. relations.